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A Pastoral Letter in response to the shooting at Emanuel AME Church

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Southeast Conference United Church of Christ

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Sisters and Brothers in Christ:

Even as we, each in our own way, cope with the grief of yet another act of violence, I ask that you first and foremost remain open to the spirit of God the Comforter. It is hard to respond in any way to such acts of violence which test our faith and our trust in humanity. All we can do is rely on God's love and power to see us through and give us the strength to reach out in prayer and word and reconciling work.

These tragedies come closer to us than we can imagine. Waltrina Middleton, a colleague who serves on the national staff of the United Church of Christ, had a family member die. Even as I gather with the Annual Meeting of the Southern Conference, we learned yesterday that a pastor in the Southern Conference has a relative among the dead. Circular Congregational UCC in Charleston has also been deeply affected. There is a deep bond of Christian love and commitment to justice among the churches in Charleston.

I have spoken with Rev. Jeremy Rutledge at Circular Congregational UCC. He told me that several religious leaders were on a civil rights bus tour of the South when word reached them. He and the pastor of the Missionary Baptist church and a rabbi flew home to Charleston yesterday to be present to their congregations and the wider community. Rev. Rutledge spoke of the deep sadness in the city. He also said that just weeks ago these leaders stood with each other in witness to the killing of Freddie Gray and now they stand in witness to the death of one of their own.

National staff has reached out to the Southeast Conference offering their support and prayers. We lifted up this tragedy in the midst of the Southern Conference Annual Meeting. Our brothers and sisters in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) have reached out. A prayer service was held yesterday in Amistad Chapel at the national offices in Cleveland. The call to prayer is available at http://www.ucc.org/news_charleston_church_shooting_06182015

Waltrina Middleton has also written a heartfelt message to the church which you can find at
http://www.ucc.org/news_commentary_unspeakable_grief_charleston_06182015

I will be present in worship on Sunday at Circular Congregational UCC and present to the Charleston community as they gather in grief and prayer. I encourage you to be in prayer for all those affected by this tragedy. I encourage you to care for your own heart and soul. I encourage you to reach out to someone today to share a kind word.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

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